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SUBJECT: PEACE PROCESS: GOI SHAKEN BY SECOND IRA STATEMENT
BUT FAVORS "INCLUSION"

Classified By: AMB JAMES C. KENNY

¶1. (S) SUMMARY: Amb Kenny met February 4 with Michael Collins, second Secretary General to PM Ahern, and Ahern's senior advisor on Northern Ireland. The ambassador indicated that the USG is inclined not to invite Northern Ireland political parties to the March 17 White House event. Collins said the GOI believes engagement with Sinn Fein is better than exclusion, and asked if the USG would be willing to defer a decision in case the environment improves. Collins said the GOI strategy regarding the peace process was to "sit tight" and let Sinn Fein find its way back in, following strong messages from the GOI and UK to Sinn Fein leaders. However, Collins said the second IRA statement made the situation worse. He said the GOI considered the February 3 IRA statement "ominous" and was "unnerved" by it. In response to the ambassador's request for more information on the bank robbery, Collins said the GOI information came mostly from the UK and from PSNI-Garda contacts, a point reinforced later on February 4 in a telephone conversation from Sean Aylward, Secretary General of DOJ. Aylward added that the GOI has a "very strong view" that Sinn Fein should not be excluded from the United States, which he wishes to discuss in person with the Ambassador at their scheduled February 8 meeting. (Note: Aylward did not specify on the phone whether he was expressing a general view on visas for Sinn Fein or a specific view on March 17 events.) Separately this week, POL/ECON chief met with political figures active in the peace process, all of whom echoed some of Michael Collins' concerns: uncertainty over whether Sinn Fein is serious about peace, whether it can bring the IRA along or would be willing to break from the IRA, and uncertainty over whether Sinn Fein is in full control of the IRA. Interlocutors also commented on the domestic political implications of the current impasse. DCM and POL/ECON Chief also attended the meeting with Collins. End Summary.

March 17

¶2. (S) On February 4, Ambassador Kenny briefed Michael Collins on current USG thinking about the March 17 events, emphasizing that the most important aspect of the occasion is the President's meeting with the Taoiseach (PM Ahern). He told Collins that the USG at this point is inclined not to invite any of the Northern Ireland parties to the White House but instead to honor civic leaders. When asked for GOI views, Collins said that it was of course a USG decision to make but it was a decision that would have ramifications in Ireland. He said that the situation is "tense" and the GOI does not want it to worsen. The GOI feels that engagement with Sinn Fein is better than exclusion. Noting that the situation is fluid, he said that the Taoiseach would prefer that no decision be made, yet, on White House participation. Collins seemed especially concerned that no decision be announced next week, given that the week will already be highly charged because of the release of the International Independent Monitoring Commission's report on the Northern Bank robbery. The discussion then turned to Sinn Fein's visa requests for events in the U.S. around St. Patrick's Day, apart from the White House. Collins reiterated the GOI's strong view that giving Sinn Fein visas to the U.S. helps the peace process.

IRA Statements of February 2 and 3

¶3. (C) Collins said that the long IRA statement of February 2 had not worried the GOI because it seemed natural for the IRA to take its decommissioning offer off the table given the abeyance in the peace process. However, he said the February 3 statement had caught them by surprise. Collins said the GOI believed the two statements were written by different drafters. The February 3 statement, he said, looked like the style of the Chief of Staff of the IRA. He called the statement "ominous" and said it had left GOI officials "unnerved and anxious." He then referred to Sinn Fein's Martin McGuinness' claim of also having no prior knowledge of the statement. He said that if McGuinness genuinely did not know in advance that the IRA would issue a second statement February 3, that could signal that Sinn Fein is genuinely breaking from the IRA. While that might indicate Sinn Fein's seriousness about pursuing peace, it would raise other issues. Was Sinn Fein losing control over the IRA? If Sinn

Fein no longer can or will serve as a conduit to the IRA, who will? Collins then noted that McGuinness did not repudiate the IRA statement, which he implied would tend to indicate no change in Sinn Fein's relationship with the IRA.

14. (C) Comment: Michael Collins' uncertainty about Sinn Fein's intentions and Sinn Fein's control over the IRA were echoed in comments across the political spectrum this week, including in conversations with Senator Martin Mansergh, former government advisor on Northern Ireland; staff from the Glencree Center for reconciliation; and a Fianna Fail political advisor. That Michael Collins and others so long and deeply engaged in the peace process would be so uncertain of Sinn Fein's intentions is not a good omen for the peace process. It indicates the degree to which the bank robbery destroyed the government's trust in Sinn Fein. Meanwhile, uncertainty about Sinn Fein's interest in peace or control over the IRA, combined with the IRA's February 3 statement, clearly has officials worried. The government steadfastly holds onto engagement with Sinn Fein because it sees no other alternative. End Comment

Peace Process

15. (C) Michael Collins said that the GOI's approach to the peace process was to "sit tight" and let Sinn Fein find its way back. Equally, the GOI will stay engaged with Sinn Fein, including a February 4 meeting between FM Dermott Ahern and Martin McGuinness, Sinn Fein's chief negotiator. Collins said that until the bank robbery, there was every expectation that a comprehensive agreement would be reached. He said the two outstanding issues, decommissioning and criminality, had been considered resolvable until the bank robbery -- which he termed a "tragedy that stopped everything." Senator Martin Mansergh, who remains influential in the peace process and close to the Taoiseach, was more expansive. He said that Sinn Fein must get the message to draw a line under paramilitarism and criminality. Echoing what we have also heard from DFA, Mansergh said that since the robbery, there is no longer any willingness to accept Sinn Fein's argument that it needs time to bring the IRA along. Like other contacts, Mansergh said that ten years is long enough and this time, all around talks can only begin on the basis of the IRA winding up. Neither Mansergh nor any government official has yet defined what they would need from Sinn Fein. They say that they will not again work on a comprehensive package only to have it fall apart at the end because of the IRA yet also say they would not expect decommissioning and a cessation of criminality to be a pre-requisite to all party talks.

GOI Information on the Northern Bank Robbery

16. (S) Collins said that the GOI's judgment on the robbery was based almost exclusively on UK intelligence. He also said that intelligence is handled very differently in the British and Irish governments. In the Irish government, many officials, including himself, do not receive any intelligence reports. The tradition instead is to take the word of the Garda. Later on February 4, at Michael Collins' request, Sean Aylward, DOJ Secretary General called the ambassador. Aylward said that he would be more precise with the Ambassador during their scheduled February 8 meeting, but confirmed that UK and PSNI information, combined with Ireland's long experience with the IRA, was the basis for the GOI assessment that IRA was behind the robbery. He said the GOI has no smoking gun or hard evidence but that the GOI considered it 99% certain that IRA conducted the robbery. Among several reasons, he said that no group other than IRA could have entered the neighborhood in which the bank manager lived. He described it as a "no go" area for the PSNI and splinter groups. He also said no other group would have the discipline, this many weeks after the robbery, not to try to use a bank note, or provide information on the van or any other aspect of the robbery. He said that the GOI does have "rock solid evidence" that Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness are members of the IRA military command and for that reason, the Taoiseach is certain they would have known in advance of the robbery.

Domestic Implications

17. (C) The GOI's all-out verbal offensive against Sinn Fein has tongues wagging about domestic politics. Martin Mansergh volunteered that as much as the Taoiseach is thinking about the 2007 elections, he values the peace process more and would sacrifice political gain if he thought peace would be advanced. Mansergh told POL/ECON chief that the bank robbery has damaged Sinn Fein in the Republic. While not yet reflected in poll numbers, Mansergh and other political operatives, believe (or hope) that some Sinn Fein voters will go elsewhere now that it is clear that Sinn Fein can not become part of any government in the Republic as long as IRA

activity continues. On radio, Mansergh made the point more colorfully: "The truth is that Sinn Fein, regardless of extra seats they might or mightn't win, wouldn't come within an asses' roar of power north or south of the Border until the IRA is off the pitch."

18. (C) Another idea sporadically under consideration is that Fianna Fail could start competing in elections in Northern Ireland. The argument is that Fianna Fail's best way of confronting Sinn Fein in the Republic is to become an all-island party. Some think doing so could also give nationalists in the north an alternative to Sinn Fein, given the SDLP's waning fortunes. Mansergh did not see this as a short term prospect, in part because the SDLP has not yet indicated an interest in merging with Fianna Fail. Derek Mooney, Fianna Fail's political advisor to the Defense Minister, says the opposite. He said the bank robbery is rapidly changing the prospective and it is the right time for Fianna Fail to move north. He noted that most of SDLP's former voters are not voting at all, and only a small percentage shifted to Sinn Fein. This, he said, leaves space for a nationalist party with a vision for the future, a space Mooney thinks SDLP will never re-gain because it is seen only as a peace process party. Mooney said Fianna Fail took a significant step in November 2004 when it changed its rules, allowing full membership for people not resident in the Republic. The rules also allow a person to be a member of both Fianna Fail and SDLP. Mooney provides campaign advice to SDLP.

KENNY